

Constraints to everyday cycle sport tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan

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The extraordinary circumstances created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a crippling impact on sport sectors across the world, including Japan. Most notably, the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, which were to be held in 2020, have been rescheduled to 2021. Along with this postponement, participation events (e.g., marathons), spectator events (e.g., all professional sport leagues), active sports attractions (e.g., golf resorts), and heritage location operations (e.g., sport museums) have been suspended indefinitely or cancelled, causing a massive impact on the sport tourism sectors in Japan.

Given this situation, Weed (2020) highlighted the importance of promoting everyday sport tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic as an “opportunity to step out of and away from the usual, mundane and routine has been valued by the public and recognized by policy makers as supporting wellbeing” (p. 86).

In particular, he noticed increased levels of both cycle commuting and cycle sport tourism closer to and around the home during the lockdown in the UK.

In Japan, cycling is a widely known tourism attraction not only for domestic tourists but also inbound tourists; for example, CNN Travel (Powell, 2015) featured the Shimanami Kaido bike routes. Additionally, as with the concept of everyday sport tourism, the new term micro tourism (regional tourism within one hour from home) has become popular in Japan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking into consideration the dispersed and community-based nature of sport resources (Hinch & Ito, 2018), the Japanese cycle sport tourism sector that particularly focuses on neighborhood destinations is well positioned to contribute to the government’s plans to achieve local revitalization and place-based community development during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the ways to achieve the local revitalization and place-based community development in full measure is to develop a deeper understanding of constraints to everyday cycle sport tourism. Constraints refer to “factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). According to Crawford et al. (1991), there are three types of constraints: (a) intrapersonal constraints, which are individual psychological qualities (e.g. personality traits) that affect the formation of leisure preferences; (b) interpersonal constraints, which involve the lack of a companion and social interactions with friends, family, and others, that interfere with leisure preferences and participation; and (c) structural constraints, which are external conditions in the environment (e.g. lack of time, money, and facilities) that prevent formed leisure preferences

from manifesting into actual leisure participation.

Recently, the author and colleagues (Ito et al., 2020) conducted cross-cultural research between Canada and Japan to develop a new typology of constraints in the context of leisure-time physical activity. Their data analyses identified nine constraint categories: psychological, physiological and physical fitness, lifestyle, interpersonal, financial, time, commitment, environmental, and activity-specific. In sport tourism contexts, Ito and Kono (2019) utilized a modified version of the constraint typology by focusing on Japanese Masters Games participants and reported that international sport tourists experienced higher levels of most constraints than domestic sport tourists and sport excursionists.



Figure 1. Ride on Wakayama Website (<https://wave.pref.wakayama.lg.jp/cycling/>)

To develop a deeper understanding of constraints to everyday cycle sport tourism, in October 2020, the author conducted an online survey for Japanese adults who were living in Wakayama City and the neighborhood municipalities one hour away from Wakayama City by cycling. Both Wakayama City and Prefecture try to leverage their resources (e.g., scenery, landscape, sightseeing spots) for the promotion of cycle sport tourism (Figure 1). One of the largest cycling events in Wakayama, the Wakayama Cycling Fest, was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, Wakayama Prefecture plans to schedule this cycling event in March 2021 with careful attention to COVID-19 (Figure 2). The author worked with a major online survey company in Japan, and the sample was drawn from its online survey panelists. Through the screening to meet the above criterion, 700 participants completed the survey. Following Leiner's (2017) recommendation, 63 participants who completed the survey twice as fast as the typical respondent (i.e.,

the relative speed index was above 2.0) were removed. Additionally, because of the focus on constraints, 21 participants who engaged in everyday cycle sport tourism in the last month were also removed. By using the remaining 616 participants' data, descriptive analyses were performed. By modifying the Ito et al.'s (2020)



Figure 2. Wakayama Cycling Fest Website (<https://www.pref.wakayama.lg.jp/prefg/020200/cyclingfesta/index.html>)

categories of constraints, ten types of constraints to everyday cycle sport tourism were measured: psychological (e.g., do not like exercising, lack of motivation), physiological (e.g., injuries, illness), lifestyle (e.g., lack of sleep, eating habits), interpersonal (e.g., lack of cycling friends, lack of family's understanding), financial (e.g., lack of money, expensive cycling costs), time (e.g., lack of free time, unstable schedule), commitments (e.g., family responsibility, community responsibility), environmental (e.g., weather, safe traffic), cycling-specific (e.g., lack of cycling equipment, little cycling information), and COVID-specific (e.g., anxiety about catching COVID-19, anxiety about spreading COVID-19). Participants reported the extent to which these constraints were relevant to non-engagement in everyday cycle sport tourism in the last month. Each constraint was measured with a single item for each type of constraints by using a five-point scale (from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much).

The participants' mean age was 52.59 years old and 60.4% (n = 372) were males. Figure 3 displays the means of each constraint.

Overall, the participants did not show a high level of constraints although they did not engage in everyday cycle sport tourism. This indicates that other constraints might exist for everyday cycle sport tourism. Due to the limited space, the three highest and lowest constraints are discussed in this report. Time constraints (M = 3.03, SD = 1.24) were experienced the most followed by psychological (M = 3.00, SD = 1.21) and cycling-specific (M = 2.91, SD = 1.20) constraints. Although remote working became more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic, time constraints (e.g., Japan's notoriously long workdays) might be still key issues for leisure activities including everyday cycle sport tourism. It is not too surprising to find that psychological or intrapersonal factors (e.g., negative attitude towards exercising) also prevented participants from engaging in everyday cycle sport tourism. As with previous studies (Ito & Kono, 2019; Ito et al., 2020), this report highlights the importance of understanding activity-specific constraints even for everyday cycle sport tourism. Most participants might not (a) have their own bicycles and (b) know where they could rent a bicycle.

On the other hand, physiological constraints (M = 2.36, SD = 1.21) were experienced the least followed by COVID-specific (M = 2.42, SD = 1.10) and environmental (M = 2.55, SD = 1.05) constraints. One of the positive aspects of cycling is that people can easily alter their level of intensity depending on their fitness level. Another positive aspect of cycling, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, is that "people simultaneously travel and socially distance" (Brooks et al., 2020, p. 1) while cycling. Therefore, people appear to see cycling as a COVID-secure activity. The unexpected result, that is, a low level of environmental constraints, might be because of (a) good weather conditions in Wakayama in October 2020 (only seven rainy days, and an average temperature of 18.5 Celsius); (b) cycling infrastructural improvements (e.g., installing cycle lanes) in Wakayama Prefecture; and/or (c) lack of attention toward cycle environments among participants.

In conclusion, this short report contributes to the sport tourism literature by examining constraints to everyday cycle sport tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that everyday cycle sport

tourism is a more sustainable form of travel (Weed, 2020), a sustained increase in everyday cycle sport tourism will be desirable not only during but also after the pandemic. The distinction between tourists and excursionists has been less important since people can travel extensively within the scope of 24 hours thanks to the advancement of transport technologies (Higham & Hinch, 2018). The new concept “everyday sport tourism” will play an enhanced role in understanding sport tourism behaviors after the pandemic (Weed, 2020). In particular, many Japanese municipalities including Wakayama Prefecture have tried to promote cycle sport tourism and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have the potential to facilitate this movement. The COVID-19 pandemic should be converted into opportunities for everyday cycle sport tourism development.

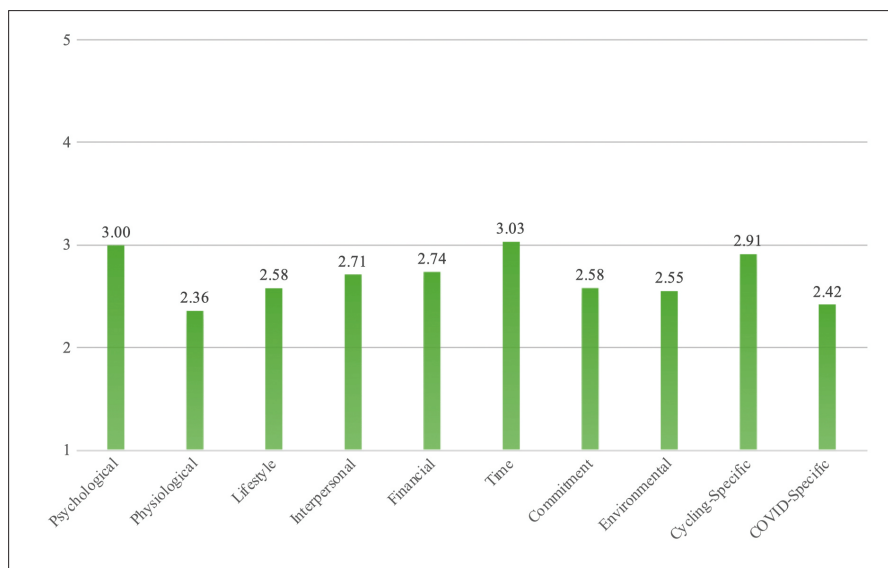


Figure 3. Means of each constraint to everyday cycle sport tourism

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